

National Council of Social Studies Ten Themes--Updated Draft

<http://communities.ncss.org/node/269>

I CULTURE

Social studies curriculum should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

Human beings create, learn, and adapt to culture. Culture helps people to understand themselves as both individuals and members of various groups. Human cultures exhibit both similarities and differences. All, for example, have systems of belief, knowledge, values, and traditions. Each is also unique. In a multicultural democratic society, students need to understand multiple perspectives that derive from different cultural vantage points. This understanding allows them to relate to people in this and other nations.

Cultures are dynamic and change over time. The study of culture prepares students to ask and answer questions such as: What is culture and what roles does it play in human and societal development? What are the common characteristics of different cultures? How is unity developed within and among cultures? What is the role of diversity within society? How is diversity maintained within a culture? How do belief systems, such as religion or political ideals, influence other parts of a culture? How does culture change to accommodate different ideas and beliefs?

Through experience and observation, students will identify cultural similarities and differences. They will acquire background knowledge through multiple modes of research and recognize the complexity of cultural systems.

In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with geography, history, and anthropology, as well as multicultural topics across the curriculum. Young learners explore concepts of likenesses and differences through school subjects such as language arts, mathematics, science, music, and art. Socially, they begin to interact with other students, some of whom are like the student and some are different. In the middle grades, students begin to explore and ask questions about the nature of culture and specific aspects of culture, such as language and beliefs, and the influence of those aspects on human behavior. As students progress through high school, they can understand and use complex cultural concepts such as adaptation, assimilation, acculturation, diffusion, and dissonance drawn from anthropology, sociology, and other disciplines to explain how culture and cultural systems function.

II TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.

Human beings seek to understand their historical roots and to locate themselves in time. Such understanding involves seeking knowledge of the past and how people, societies, and cultures change and develop. Studying changes over time helps us to understand the present and make informed decisions about the future. The development of historical perspectives leads to skills in

inquiry, analysis and problem-solving. Historical understanding allows for an appreciation of the world's diverse cultures and institutions, as well as our common problems.

Knowing how to read, reconstruct, and interpret the past allows one to develop a historical understanding and to answer questions such as: What happened in the past and how has that effected who we are today? How has the world changed and how might it change in the future? How do we know what happened in the past? What is historical inquiry and why should citizens and learners engage in this inquiry? How can the perspective we have about our own life experiences be viewed as part of the larger human story across time? How do personal stories over time reflect varying points of view and inform contemporary ideas and actions?

Students draw upon historical knowledge during the examination of issues including multiple perspectives from various aspects of history. Through the interpretation of evidence from the past, students reach conclusions about its impact on the present and future.

Learners in early grades gain experience with sequencing to establish a sense of order and time. The use of stories helps children learn historical concepts among ethical and moral boundaries. In addition, in society children will begin to recognize that individuals may hold different views about events in the past and to understand the linkages between human decisions and consequences. Thus, the foundation is laid for the development of historical knowledge, skills, and values. In the middle grades, students, through a more formal study of history, continue to expand their understanding of the past and of historical concepts and inquiry. They begin to understand and appreciate differences in historical perspectives, recognizing that interpretations are influenced by individual experiences, societal values, and cultural traditions. High school students engage in more sophisticated analysis and reconstruction of the past, examining its relationship to the present and extrapolating into the future. Students also learn to draw on their knowledge of history to make informed choices and decisions in the present.

PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS

Social studies curriculum should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

Technological advances connect students at all levels to the world beyond their personal locations. Geography helps students understand the world they live in and gives them insight into where things are located, why they are there, and why students should care. The study of people, places, and human-environment interactions assists learners as they develop their spatial views and geographic perspectives of the world. This area of study helps learners make informed and critical decisions about the relationships between human beings and their environment.

Today's social, cultural, economic, and civic demands on individuals mean that students will need the knowledge, skills, and understanding to ask and answer questions such as: Why is location important? What physical and human characteristics lead to the creation of regions? Why do people move and decide to live where they do? What are the implications of natural and human interaction on the environment? How do maps, globes and other geographic tools contribute to understanding of people, places and environments?

Student experiences will encourage increasingly abstract thought as they use data and apply skills in analyzing human behavior in relation to its physical and cultural environment. Geographic concepts

become central to learners' comprehension of global connections as they expand their knowledge of diverse peoples and places, both historical and contemporary. The importance of core geographic concepts to public policy is recognized and should be explored as students address issues of domestic and international significance.

In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with regional studies and geography. In the early grades, young learners draw upon immediate personal experiences in their neighborhoods, towns and cities, and states as well as peoples and places distant and unfamiliar to explore geographic concepts and skills. They also express interest in and have concern for the use and abuse of the physical environment. During the middle school years, students relate their personal and academic experiences to happenings in other environmental contexts as they explore peoples, places and environments in this country and in different regions of the world. Students in high school are able to apply understanding of geographic tools and systems across a broad range of themes and fields, including the fine arts, sciences, and humanities.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY

Social studies curriculum should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.

Personal identity is shaped by one's culture, by groups, and by institutional influences. Given the nature of individual development in one's own cultural context, students need to be aware of the processes of learning, growth and development at every level of their own school experiences. Examination of various forms of human behavior enhances understanding of the relationships among social norms and emerging personal identities, the social processes that influence identity formation, and the ethical principles underlying individual action.

Questions around identity and development are central to the understanding of who we are. Such questions include: How do individuals grow and change physically, emotionally and intellectually? Why do individuals behave as they do? What influences how people learn, perceive, and grow? How do people meet their basic needs in a variety of contexts? How do individuals develop over time?

Students will be able to describe factors important to the development of personal identity. Students will be able to explore the influence of peoples, places, and events on personal development. Students will hone personal skills such as demonstrating self-direction when working towards and accomplishing personal goals and tolerating other's beliefs, feelings, and convictions

In the early grades, young learners develop their personal identities in the context of families, peers, schools, and communities. Central to this development are the exploration, identification, and analysis of how individuals and groups relate to others. In the middle grades, issues of personal identity are refocused as the individual begins to explain self in relation to others, collaborate with peers and with others, and study society and different cultures. At the high school level, students need to encounter multiple opportunities to examine contemporary patterns of human behavior, using methods from the behavioral sciences to apply core concepts drawn from psychology, social psychology, sociology, and anthropology as they apply to individuals, societies, and cultures.

INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.

Institutions are the formal and informal political, economic, and social organizations that help us carry out, organize, and manage our daily affairs. They also help mediate conflicts. Institutions such as schools, churches, families, government agencies, and the courts all play an integral role in our lives. These and other institutions exert enormous influence over us, yet institutions are no more than organizational embodiments to further the core social values of those who comprise them.

It is important that students know how institutions are formed, what controls and influences them, how they control and influence individuals and culture, and how institutions can be maintained or changed. The study of individuals, groups, and institutions, drawing upon sociology, anthropology, and other disciplines, prepares students to ask and answer questions such as: What is the role of institutions in this and other societies? How am I influenced by institutions? How do institutions change? What is my role in institutional change?

Students identify those institutions that they encounter. They will analyze how these institutions operate and find ways that will help them participate more effectively with these institutions. Finally students will examine the foundations of the institutions that they face, and determine how they can contribute to the shared goals and desires of society.

In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, and history. Young children should be given opportunities to examine various institutions that affect their lives and influence their thinking. They should be assisted in recognizing the tensions that occur when the goals, values, and principles of two or more institutions or groups conflict—for example, when the school board prohibits candy machines in schools vs. a class project to install a candy machine to help raise money for the local hospital. They should also have opportunities to explore ways in which institutions such as churches or health care networks are created to respond to changing individual and group needs. Middle school learners will benefit from varied experiences through which they examine the ways in which institutions change over time, promote social conformity, and influence culture. They should be encouraged to use this understanding to suggest ways to work through institutional change for the common good. High school students must understand the paradigms and traditions that undergird social and political institutions. They should be provided opportunities to examine, use, and add to the body of knowledge related to the behavioral sciences and social theory as it relates to the ways people and groups organize themselves around common needs, beliefs, and interests.

POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

Understanding the foundations of political thought, the historical development various structures of power, authority, and governance and their evolving functions in contemporary U.S. society, as well as in other parts of the world, is essential for developing civic competence.

By examining the purposes and characteristics of various governance systems, learners develop an understanding of how groups and nations attempt to resolve conflicts and seek to establish order and security.

In exploring this theme, students confront questions such as: What are the purposes and functions of government? Under what circumstances is the exercise of political power legitimate? What is the proper scope and limits of authority? How are individual rights protected within the context of majority rule? What conflicts exist among fundamental principles and values of constitutional democracy? What are the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a constitutional democracy?

Through study of the dynamic relationships between individual rights and responsibilities, the needs of social groups, and concepts of a just society, learners become more effective problem-solvers and decision-makers when addressing the persistent issues and social problems encountered in public life. By applying concepts and methods of political science and law, students learn how people in groups function for societal change, instead of personal gain.

In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with government, politics, political science, civics, history, law, and other social sciences. Learners in the early grades explore their natural and developing sense of fairness and order as they experience relationships with others. They develop an increasingly comprehensive awareness of rights and responsibilities in specific contexts. During the middle school years, these rights and responsibilities are applied in more complex contexts with emphasis on new applications. They study the various systems that have been developed over the centuries to allocate and employ power and authority in the governing process. High school students develop their abilities in the use of abstract principles. At every level, learners should have opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills to and participate in the workings of the various levels of power, authority, and governance.

PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, AND CONSUMPTION

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.

People have wants that often exceed the limited resources available to them. Unequal distribution of resources necessitates systems of exchange, including trade, to improve the well-being of the economy, while the role of government in economic policymaking varies over time and from place to place. Increasingly these decisions are global in scope and require systematic study of an interdependent world economy and the role of technology in economic decision-making. As a result, a variety of ways have been invented to decide upon answers to four fundamental questions: What is to be produced? How is production to be organized? How are goods and services to be distributed?

In exploring this theme, students confront such questions as: What is the most effective allocation of the factors of production (land, labor, capital, and management)? What are the best ways to deal with market failures? How does interdependence brought on by globalization impact local social systems?

Students will gather and analyze data, as well as use critical thinking skills to determine how best to deal with scarcity of resources. The economic way of thinking will also be an important tool for students as they analyze complex aspects of the economy.

In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with concepts, principles, and issues drawn from the discipline of economics. Young learners begin by prioritizing their economic wants. They explore economic decision-making as they compare their own economic experiences with those of others and consider the wider consequences of those decisions on groups, communities, the nation, and beyond. In the middle grades, learners expand their knowledge of

economic concepts and principles, and use economic reasoning processes in addressing issues related to the four fundamental economic questions. High school students develop economic perspectives and deeper understanding of key economic concepts and processes through systematic study of a range of economic and sociopolitical systems, with particular emphasis on the examination of domestic and global economic policy options related to matters such as health care, resource use, unemployment, and trade.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY

Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of relationships among science, technology, and society.

Science, and its application, technology, affects cultural change and people's interaction with their world. Technological advances allow people around the world to be connected instantaneously beyond their immediate locations. Modern life as we know it would be impossible without technology and the science that supports it.

But both raise many questions about how we perceive our culture and the role science and technology play in our lives. Is new technology always better than that which it will replace? What can we learn from the past about how new technologies result in broader social change, some of which is unanticipated? How can we cope with the ever-increasing pace of change, perhaps even with the feeling that technology has gotten out of control? How can we manage technology so that the greatest number of people benefit? How can we preserve our fundamental values and beliefs in a world that is rapidly becoming one technology-linked village? How does science and technology affect our sense of self and morality? How are disparate cultures, geographically separated, impacted by events, e.g., the spread of AIDS?

This theme appears in units or courses dealing with history, geography, economics, and civics and government. It draws upon several scholarly fields from the natural and physical sciences, social sciences, and the humanities for specific examples of issues and the knowledge base for considering responses to the societal issues related to science and technology.

Young children can learn how technologies influence beliefs and how their daily lives are intertwined with a host of technologies. They can study how basic technologies such as ships, automobiles, and airplanes have evolved and how we have employed technology such as air conditioning, dams, and irrigation to modify our physical environment and contribute to changes in global health and economics. From history (their own and others'), they can construct examples of how technologies such as the wheel, the stirrup, and an understanding of DNA altered the course of history. By the middle grades, students can begin to explore the complex relationships among technology, human values, and behavior. They will find that science and technology bring changes that surprise us and even challenge our beliefs, as in the case of discoveries and their applications related to our universe, the genetic basis of life, atomic physics, and others. As they move from the middle grades to high school, students will need to think analytically about how we can manage technology so that we control it rather than the other way around. Students must confront such issues, the protection of privacy in the age of the Internet, electronic surveillance, and the opportunities and challenges of genetic engineering, test-tube life, and medical technology with all their implications for longevity and quality of life and religious implications.

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

Social studies curriculum should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.

Globalization has intensified and accelerated the changes faced at the local, national and international level. The effects are evident in the rapidly changing social, economic, and political institutions and systems. Technology has removed or lowered many barriers bringing far-flung cultures together. The connections we have to the rest of the world provide opportunities for creativity and empowerment, yet they also create power vacuums that bring about uncertainty. The realities of global interdependence require understanding the increasingly important and diverse global connections among world societies.

In exploring this theme, students confront questions such as: What is “globalization” and what are its consequences? What are the benefits from and problems associated with global interdependence? How should people and societies balance global connectedness with the need for local roots? What is needed for life to thrive on an ever changing, shrinking planet?

Analysis of tensions between national interests and global priorities contributes to the development of possible solutions to persistent and emerging global issues. Interpreting patterns and relationships within and among world cultures, helps learners examine policy alternatives that have both national and global implications.

This theme typically appears in units or courses dealing with geography, culture, and economics, but again can draw upon the natural and physical sciences and the humanities, including literature, the arts, and language. Through exposure to various media and first-hand experiences, young learners become aware of and are affected by events on a global scale. Within this context, students in early grades examine and explore global connections and basic issues and concerns, suggesting and initiating responsive action plans. In the middle years, learners can initiate analysis of the interactions among states and nations and their cultural complexities as they respond to global events and changes. At the high school level, students are able to think systematically about personal, national, and global decisions, interactions, and consequences, including addressing critical issues such as peace, human rights, trade, and global ecology.

CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES

Social studies curriculum should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

An understanding of civic ideals and practices of citizenship is critical to full participation in society and is a central purpose of the social studies. All people have a stake in examining civic ideals and practices across time and in diverse societies as well as at home, and in determining how to close the gap between present practices and the ideals upon which our democratic republic is based.

Questions faced by students studying this might be: What is the balance between rights and responsibilities? What is civic participation? How do citizens become involved? What is the role of the citizen in the community and the nation, and as a member of the world community?

Students will explore how individuals and institutions interact. They will also recognize and respect different points of view. Students learn by experience how to participate in community service and political activities and how to use democratic process to influence public policy.

In schools, this theme typically appears in units or courses dealing with history, political science, cultural anthropology, and fields such as global studies and law-related education, while also drawing upon content from the humanities. In the early grades, students are introduced to civic ideals and practices through activities such as helping to set classroom expectations, examining experiences in relation to ideals, and determining how to balance the needs of individuals and the group. During these years, children also experience views of citizenship in other times and places through stories and drama. By the middle grades, students expand their ability to analyze and evaluate the relationships between ideals and practice. They are able to see themselves taking civic roles in their communities. High school students increasingly recognize the rights and responsibilities of citizens in identifying societal needs, setting directions for public policies, and working to support both individual dignity and the common good.

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Posted online May 2008